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Highlands Council awards 12 planning grants at October meeting

CHESTER, N.J. – The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council today awarded Initial Assessment Grants to 12 municipalities from six counties in the Highlands Region, bringing the total number of Initial Assessment Grants awarded to 31.

Initial Assessment Grants can be used by municipalities with lands in the Planning Area, where conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan is optional, to determine if they want to conform to the Plan; or by municipalities with lands in the Preservation Area, where conformance is mandatory, to determine how they will bring their master plans and regulations into conformance.

The 12 municipalities awarded grants at tonight's meeting were: Mahwah Township in Bergen County; Califon Borough, the Town of Clinton, Clinton Township, Glen Gardner Borough, and Tewksbury Township in Hunterdon County; Boonton Township, Denville Township and Randolph Township in Morris County; Bernards Township in Somerset County; Sparta Township in Sussex County; and Washington Borough in Warren County. There were no applicants from Passaic County, but three of the five Passaic County municipalities in the Highlands Region were previously awarded grants.

Initial Assessment Grants have been awarded to 31 of the 88 municipalities in the Highlands Region, covering 395,994 of the 859,358 acres in the Highlands Region. That represents 35 percent of the total number of municipalities and 46 percent of the total acreage in the Highlands, including more than half of the Preservation Area. At least one municipality from each of the seven counties in the Highlands Region has applied.

The Highlands Council awarded \$185,000 in Initial Assessment Grants at tonight's meeting, bringing the total amount awarded to nearly \$500,000. Section 18 of the Highlands Act authorizes the Highlands Council to make available grants, as well as other financial and technical assistance, to municipalities and counties in the Highlands Region. On Feb. 28, 2008, the Highlands Council

authorized the use of up to \$1.5 million in state funding to be awarded through the Initial Assessment Grant program.

A full list and a map of the Highlands Region municipalities that have applied for the program can be viewed on the Highlands Council's Web site at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us>.

In addition to the Initial Assessment Grants, the Council also awarded \$25,000 Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Feasibility Grant to Washington Borough in Warren County. The borough can receive an additional \$10,000, at the discretion of the Executive Director, if the need for additional funding can be demonstrated by the borough. It is the fourth TDR Feasibility Grant awarded by the Highlands Council, following earlier grants to the Town of Clinton and Lopatcong in the Highlands and the City of Clifton, which is not in the Highlands Region. (Municipalities from regions outside the Highlands Region can apply for TDR Feasibility Grants if they receive plan endorsement from the State Planning Commission.)

For more information about Highlands Council grants programs, go to <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/stake/municipalities.html>.